

ADDITIONAL FACTORS
IN WESTERN EUROPEAN OPINION
RELEVANT TO THE
FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE

October 15, 1955

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White et al.

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**WESTERN EUROPEAN OPINION
RELEVANT TO THE
FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE**

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FOREWORD

This report provides a supplement to "Opinion Trends in the Aftermath of Geneva," September 23. It presents an interpretation of Western European opinion since Geneva on a number of issues and problems relevant to the Western Alliance and the forthcoming Foreign Ministers Conference not treated in the September 23 study.

The data in this report are taken primarily from poll data drawn from USIA's Barometer Surveys -- particularly from the comprehensive August survey.

The cooperation of the USIA is gratefully acknowledged.

Nelson A. Rockefeller

October 15, 1955

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WESTERN EUROPEAN OPINION
RELEVANT TO THE FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE

1. HIGHLIGHTS

"Opinion Trends in the Aftermath of Geneva," September 23, based on the comprehensive August survey of Western European opinion, brought out -- in addition to the substantial increases in the general "popularity" ratings of both major participants in the East-West negotiations -- disturbing trends in popular feelings toward European security, specifically NATO.

-- In brief, the data indicated a marked undermining of the Western Alliance in terms of public opinion support of NATO -- an increased willingness to accept some general "European Security" alternative -- and a growing inclination to accept the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe.

Analysis of additional data received from the comprehensive August survey of Western European opinion suggests the following further conclusions:

- Only one-third of the Western Europeans expect solid accomplishment from the Foreign Ministers Meeting.
- The general public in Western Europe seems disinterested in the issues - apparently because it has concluded that

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for the immediate future at least war is unlikely and there is no longer a threat to personal security.

-- Better informed, upper-level, opinion is equally sanguine about the imminence of war but shows considerably greater interest in and concern for the issues that continue to divide East and West.

-- Opinion leaders, furthermore, show more positive support for measures that will preserve Free World unity.

-- Western Europeans, generally, are no longer seriously worried about "nuclear war." Most people believe there has been a sincere turn-away both in the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. to peaceful uses of atomic energy.

-- In this connection, there has been a marked decrease in feelings that the U.S.S.R. is "insincere."

-- On "neutralism" in Western Europe -- what appears to have happened is an increasing disinclination to "take sides" in the East-West struggle primarily because it seems no longer necessary to "take sides."

-- In this context, there seems to be an over-all stabilization of Western European opinion support for the Western alliance as a kind of abstract principle but little popular awareness of the vital importance of the Free World position on NATO, disarmament, and German reunification to maintain Western unity and strength.

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2. The Foreign Ministers Conference

The widespread popular satisfaction and general relaxation that preceded and followed the Summit Meeting appear by no means to be matched by high expectations of solutions to major issues at the Foreign Ministers Conference.

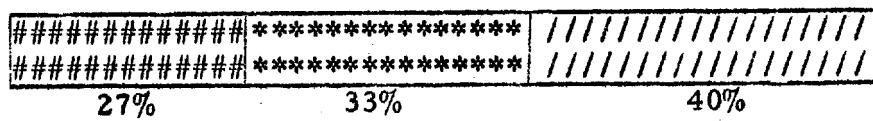
On the surface, this would seem somewhat surprising. It might be expected that popular hopes would be focused on the upcoming Foreign Ministers meeting to register real progress toward international detente.

But averaging the results from the four major countries (Britain, West Germany, France, and Italy) to a question as to whether or not the Foreign Ministers will arrive at substantial agreements on any major issues -- the responses were:

Yes,
will agree

No,
won't agree

No opinion



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Taking into account that the percentages are somewhat distorted by the overwhelmingly pessimistic expectations of the West Germans,

West Germany

Yes	12%
No	<u>66%</u>
No opinion	22%

which undoubtedly reflects their preoccupation with -- and discouragement about -- reunification, roughly only one-third (32%) of the general public in the three other countries expect substantial agreement on any of the major issues.

Equally significant is the lack of interest in this important event reflected in the large percentage holding No Opinion -- 40% of the total sample and -- even more -- 46%, if West German opinion is excluded.

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3. The Threat of War as an Issue

Low expectations of real, substantive progress in East-West negotiations are in sharp contrast to popular feelings about the imminence of war. In the four major countries, fear of war both among the general public and better-informed groups is at the lowest point since surveys were started in October 1954.

Composite 4 Countries
(Britain, West Germany, Italy, France)

August 1955

	<u>All</u>	<u>Upper</u>
Will be a war	6%	4%
Will not be a war	65%	75%
Qualified answer	9%	8%
No opinion	20%	13%
	<u>100%</u>	<u>100%</u>

Some correlation between expectations of continuing tension between East and West and fear of conflict might logically be expected.

However, comparisons of these responses provide no such correlation. What may have happened is that Western Europeans generally have concluded that war at this particular juncture is no longer a factor -- either as a threat to personal security or as a primary consideration in the East-West conflict. The emotional freight that once was attached to the issues seems largely to have disappeared.

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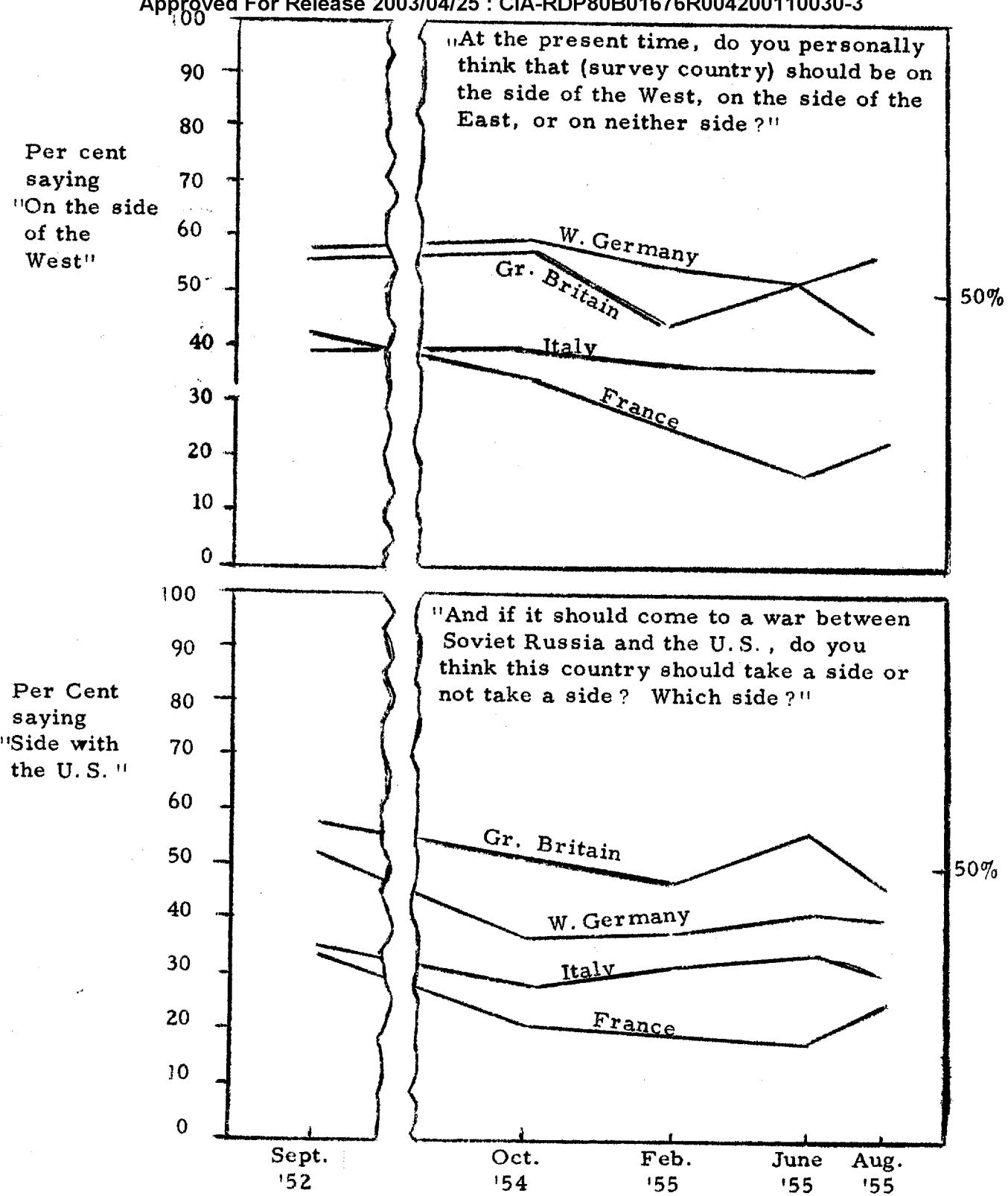
4. Neutralism

Responses to questions on "taking sides" either under cold or hot-war conditions are quite naturally colored by the underlying feeling that it isn't really necessary to "take sides."

This was borne out by the startling increase in support for withdrawing U.S. troops and bases from Europe if the Russians withdrew their forces to within the U.S.S.R. -- 50% of the Western Europeans favored this proposal in August as opposed to only 38% in June.

Graphs of relatively long term opinion trends on two critical questions show no movement toward abandonment of the Western alliance. What seems rather to be happening on the popular level is a general leveling out -- or stabilization of feelings -- toward general adherence to the Western camp.

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But "adherence" to the West proves to be somewhat superficial when placed in the context of the full responses to the question as to "which side" Western Europeans think they ought to be on at the present time:

While an average of 40% think they ought to side with the West, as opposed to a mere 3% who feel they ought to side with the East -- 36% prefer "Neither Side" and 21% have "No Opinion."

This would most certainly indicate a substantial allergy towards any real involvement in the East-West conflict -- cold or hot.

Opinion on the "crisis" question -- taking sides in the event of war between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. indicates even stronger determination "not to take sides."

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On the popular level, therefore, there would seem to be a highly dangerous penetration of "neutralism" -- in the practical sense of not wishing to be "involved" with either side.

But as also can be seen from the foregoing data, opinion leaders seem less "neutralist." In brief, opinion leaders -- who might be expected to reflect more closely official opinion -- seem equally "relaxed" about the threat or imminence of war but show majority support for the Western position in a crisis.

5. The Bomb

One factor that undoubtedly has contributed to general "relaxation" among the public at large in Western Europe is the sharply decreased apprehension of nuclear warfare.

Most Western Europeans now see a shift of emphasis by both sides toward peaceful rather than military uses of atomic energy -- as seen by the composite response to the following:

Question: "Considering the development of both military and peaceful uses of the atom, is it your impression that the U.S. has shifted its emphasis in recent months toward peaceful uses, toward military uses, or hasn't there been any change?"

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Question: "Now about Soviet Russia -- is it your impression that the U.S.S.R. has shifted its emphasis in recent months toward peaceful uses, toward military uses, or hasn't there been any change?"

The far greater number of respondents who see a shift in U. S. emphasis toward peaceful uses of atomic energy -- as opposed to those who see a similar shift in emphasis by the U. S. S. R. -- is undoubtedly a reflection of the initiative exercised by the U. S. both at the Summit Meeting and the subsequent Atomic Conference.

On the other hand, the fact that a clear plurality believe that the USSR has shifted away from military toward peaceful uses of nuclear energy is a mark of the extraordinary degree to which the general Western European public appears to have accepted Soviet peaceful intentions.

This fact is borne out by comparing responses to a question aimed at testing attitudes toward U.S. and Soviet "sincerity" in their efforts to ban atomic weapons. Taking the four countries together:

42% of the respondents in August believed the U.S. to be "sincere" in its efforts to ban the bomb -- a jump of 12 percentage

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points over the response in June.

25% of the respondents thought the U. S. S. R. was making sincere efforts to ban the bomb -- 8 percentage points greater than the response in June.

Testing insincerity -- only 25% of the respondents thought the U. S. was "insincere" -- a decline of 14 percentage points from June.

-- Only 31% felt in August that the U. S. S. R. was insincere -- as compared with 48% who felt so in June.

-- In other words, the U. S. S. R. gained 17 percentage points in its rating -- 3 more than the U. S.

The significance of these data, therefore, lies particularly in the marked decline in popular feeling that the U. S. S. R. is "insincere." This adds another factor to the conclusion reached in our previous report* on the marked decrease generally in the "unpopularity" of the Soviet Union in Western European opinion.

*See Opinion Trends on the Aftermath of Geneva, September 23.

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6. Disarmament

The questions on disarmament that were asked in the August survey were linked in one way or another to President Eisenhower's inspection proposal. While responses to these questions point to the tremendously favorable impact of the proposal on Western European opinion -- the association of the President's name and proposal with the questions undoubtedly colored responses to the subject of disarmament as an "issue."

For this reason, therefore, responses to questions on whether an effective disarmament agreement should or should not require provisions for mutual inspection were probably weighted high in favor of inspection because of the explicit reference to the President's proposal.

In the "flash" survey taken immediately after the Summit Conference, an overwhelming 64% of the respondents in the four countries who had heard of the Summit Conference registered approval of the President's proposal.

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In the August survey the question was asked:

"President Eisenhower has said that any effective disarmament agreement must include a mutual inspection system. Others say that a disarmament agreement even without inspection is better than none at all.

Do you think that the U. S. should insist on inspection or agree to arms reduction even without inspection?"

<u>Returns for all respondents:</u>	<u>Great Britain</u>	<u>West Germany</u>	<u>Italy</u>	<u>France</u>
U. S. should insist on inspection	49%	46%	45%	48%
Agree to arms reduction without inspection	23	17	12	19
No opinion	<u>28</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>37</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>43</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>33</u> <u>100%</u>
<u>Returns for upper economic level only</u>	<u>Great Britain</u>	<u>West Germany</u>	<u>Italy</u>	<u>France</u>
U. S. should insist on inspection	60%	63%	63%	58%
Agree to arms reduction without inspection	23	20	9	19
No opinion	<u>17</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>17</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>28</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>23</u> <u>100%</u>

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The interesting thing about these responses -- taking into account that the response is higher than what might have been expected if the question had not been linked to the U. S. and President Eisenhower -- is that on a composite basis far fewer of the general public are prepared to insist on inspection than approve it in principle --

47% versus 64%

- Another interesting feature -- considering the widespread knowledge of the President's proposal -- is the rather large "No opinion" on the question -- an over-all average of 35%.
- On the other hand, on the opinion leadership level, there appears to be greater support for insistence upon inspection -- 61% -- and far fewer, only 21%, holding no opinion.

The significance of these data is by no means clear-cut partly, as mentioned previously, because of the association of the President's personal prestige and his specific inspection proposal in the general question on disarmament.

On the other hand -- carrying forward the interpretation made previously that the general public shows a disinclination to be concerned about issues -- these data certainly indicate that recognition of the importance of inspection in a disarmament agreement is disturbingly slight.

But also as noted previously, better informed segments of the population appear to realize far more the importance of the issues. In this instance, a majority believes the U.S. should insist upon "inspection."

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7. German Unification and European Security

With two important qualifications, much the same interpretation may be given to the responses to another "issue" question in the August survey -- on the German problem and its relation to European security.

Question: "In your judgment, can an effective European security system be set up without German reunification, or do you think that German reunification must precede any effective European security system?"

<u>Return for all respondents:</u>	<u>Great Britain</u>	<u>Italy</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>West Germany</u>
Reunification need not precede	17%	18%	29%	10%
Reunification must precede	39	35	24	66
No opinion	<u>44</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>47</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>47</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>24</u> <u>100%</u>
<u>Returns for upper economic level only:</u>	<u>Great Britain</u>	<u>Italy</u>	<u>France</u>	<u>West Germany</u>
Reunification need not precede	17%	13%	33%	15%
Reunification must precede	51	58	29	75
No opinion	<u>32</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>29</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>38</u> <u>100%</u>	<u>10</u> <u>100%</u>

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As can be seen from the above, French opinion is split down the middle as to whether or not German reunification is prerequisite to an effective European security system. In West Germany -- quite naturally -- there is overwhelming insistence upon reunification as a prerequisite.

In Britain and Italy, however, considerable "softness" about German reunification appears among the general public -- and a much firmer attitude among upper-level groups.

The data presented above appear to support a conclusion that the general public in the major Western European countries has fallen fairly completely for the "Spirit of Geneva" and seems to regard what has happened thus far as a tolerable "solution" to East-West differences.

Fuzziness of feelings about the important issues that continue to divide the two major protagonists has potentially serious implications for the degree of support Western negotiators may receive for "firm" positions and proposals in future meetings with the Soviets.

The more realistic views of upper level groups in Western Europe -- and more positive support of these groups for the Western alliance -- are encouraging and perhaps indicate a need for better and more consistent communication of their opinions to the general public.